



Ad Reinhardt

Whitney Museum of American Art



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Ad Reinhardt

*A Concentration of Works from the Permanent Collection
of the Whitney Museum of American Art*

*Patterson Sims
Associate Curator, Permanent Collection*

*A 50th Anniversary Exhibition
December 10, 1980–February 8, 1981*

Ad Reinhardt is one of a series of exhibitions celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Each exhibition concentrates on the work of one artist represented in depth in the Permanent Collection of the Museum. The series is sponsored by Champion International Corporation. The exhibitions were organized and the accompanying publications written by Patterson Sims, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection.

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Cover:

Ad Reinhardt, **Number 30**, 1938
Oil on canvas, 40 1/2 × 42 1/2 inches
Promised gift of Rita Reinhardt

Introduction

Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967) described his birth as taking place nine months after the close of the Armory Show in New York, on the eve of Europe's entry into World War I, and during the year in which "Malevich paints first geometric-abstract painting."¹ Reinhardt's formidable sense of chronology meshed the personal, the cultural and the political. He was the best-traveled and most art-historically informed American painter of his generation. More than any other artist of his time, Reinhardt turned to writing to express his artistic and moral concerns. His prose became the carrier of the content he felt should best be left out of his art. Though his contribution as a painter is predominant, his correlative but, for him, much less significant activity as a lecturer and writer never diminished. Indeed, as his paintings became increasingly reductive, his prose grew increasingly complex.

Implicit in the development of Reinhardt's art were impenetrable barricades to descriptive, biographical or art-historical exposition. He believed only in abstract art. He repeatedly insisted on art as art alone, and made paintings that fulfill his assertion. As a result, most explanations of Reinhardt's art must perform variations upon the fugue of his prose. A biographical approach to Reinhardt has been appropriately subordinated, but sketching the historical context of his life and work is both possible and informative.

Reinhardt's individualism was already evident when he attended Columbia University between 1931 and 1935. He was the first member of his family to attend college. He selected Columbia because it provided a broadly based liberal education. Most of his associates there were future writers: Robert Gibney, Seymour Freedgood, James Wechsler, the poets John Berryman and Robert Lax, and the novelist Herman Wouk. At Columbia he formed his close friendship with Thomas Merton, later a Trappist monk. Though Reinhardt socialized with writers and initially

studied literature, his years at Columbia reinforced an early decision to be an artist. From literature, he soon turned to courses in art history and aesthetics. Professor Meyer Schapiro, for over five decades a vital link between art history and the artists who would make it, directed Reinhardt's abundant energies into what were then considered radical campus politics. Reinhardt came by his political liberalism easily: both his parents were ardent unionists and his father was a labor organizer and lifelong Socialist. His political activities at Columbia were directed toward abolishing fraternities and to the production of controversial cartoons on this and other university issues. Taking over from the much more conservative Wouk, Reinhardt became editor of *Jester*, the campus humor publication. He designed covers in a flattened Cubist style. As Merton later recalled, Reinhardt's "issues of *Jester* were real magazines. I think that in cover designs and layouts he could have given lessons to some of the art-editors downtown."² Reinhardt was subsequently elected to a national organization of collegiate comics editors.

Though Reinhardt's decision to be an artist was encouraged by his years at Columbia, the university offered little practical instruction. After graduating, Reinhardt avoided the Art Students League and, instead, studied painting with Karl Anderson and John Martin at the National Academy of Design. He also took private classes at the American Artists' School in 1936 with Francis Criss, who stressed an asymmetrical geometry in his depictions of the city, and Carl Holty, whose art flattened and separated the figure into complex sweeping shapes of solid color. At Criss' and Holty's small school on Fourteenth Street, Reinhardt was one of a small band of artists offered alternatives to the dominance of Social Realism. In 1937, with the sponsorship of Holty, Reinhardt joined the recently

formed American Abstract Artists (AAA), an organization of which Holty was chairman and which represented almost the entire American abstract movement within its fewer than fifty members. He also affiliated with the Artists' Union and the American Artists' Congress. Stuart Davis was associated with the two latter organizations and from this time on Davis, who was a neighbor of Reinhardt's, was a quasi-mentor to the younger artist. By becoming a member of these three organizations, Reinhardt allied himself with the major avant-garde American artistic-political groups of the late 1930s.

From 1936 to 1941, Reinhardt's financial support came from the Federal Art Project; he was employed, following the recommendation of his AAA cohort Burgoyne Diller, in the Easel Division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) at \$87.60 a month. Reinhardt was among the relatively few non-objective artists in the project. Numerous paintings resulted, several of which are extant. In the late 1930s, Reinhardt's art consisted of solid-toned, linear, interlocking, geometric forms. He seems to have attained a kind of immediate artistic maturity. His circular and rectilinear shapes grew in complexity through the early 1940s as organic and gestural markings gradually replaced precise and hard-edged forms. Though the foundation of his art was collage, as the decade progressed embellished linear activity seized the paintings and drawings. His work assumed a character related to other of the budding Abstract Expressionists. When Barnett Newman organized in 1947 a group exhibition, "The Ideographic Picture," at Betty Parsons Gallery, he selected for inclusion himself, Hofmann, Stamos and Reinhardt. With a year's interruption for military service in 1944-45, throughout the 1940s, Reinhardt's art progressively focused upon gestural, linear and coloristic saturation.

Between 1941, when he was laid off the WPA, and 1947, when he commenced teaching art history at Brooklyn College,

Reinhardt ran the gamut of commercial and industrial jobs and freelance graphic work. He was associated with *PM* newspaper as an artist-reporter from 1942 to 1947. Recognition for his art began in the mid-1940s. His earliest solo shows occurred in 1943 and 1944. In 1944, his work was first acquired by a public collection, A. E. Gallatin's Museum of Living Art; this collection was donated in 1946 to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reinhardt joined the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1946, where he remained, unlike so many of his more financially ambitious peers, throughout his life.

Reinhardt's age and the artistic affinities of his 1940s work have allied him most meaningfully with the artists of the New York School or, as they are alternatively designated, the Abstract Expressionists. Apart from Robert Motherwell (with whom he edited in 1951 the sole issue of *Modern Artists in America*, an issue devoted to nascent Abstract Expressionism), Reinhardt was the most verbally proficient and intellectually curious of these painters. His art matured alongside, and at times resembles, that of Motherwell, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb, Lee Krasner, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Bradley Walker Tomlin. Of this group, he was friendliest with Newman and Rothko. But though they evolved together, Reinhardt reached a completely contrary conclusion. An essential dissimilitude of mind prevailed. The biomorphism, emotionalism, and the cult of individuality that Abstract Expressionists favored, Reinhardt abhorred. His connections with the New York School painters dissolved in the 1950s, when he began to produce single-color, geometric paintings.

Around 1949 Reinhardt's line increased in stature and returned gridded structure to the paintings. Curved forms were eliminated in favor of horizontal and vertical brick-like strokes of paint. Ragged, sinuous edges were purged. By 1952, the solid symmetrical blocks of color that define late Reinhardt paintings appeared. These simply structured paintings led to Reinhardt's final "black" series of dark

and seemingly impenetrable works. With compulsive constancy, he pursued this ultimate form until he died of a heart attack in 1967 at the age of fifty-three.

The purity and ultimate simplicity of Reinhardt's culminating single-tone variation paintings—using red, blue and black tonalities—are a logical outcome of the technical and physical evolution of his art-making. The return to the geometric in the early 1950s was catalyzed by his new perception of the work of Mondrian and his personal contact with Josef Albers. Reinhardt's identification with the New York School was challenged by his more potent role as the precursor of the Minimalist and conceptually based art of the 1960s and 1970s. The physical presence of Reinhardt's late works is pregnant with conceptual implication. His study of art history and thirst to absorb as many of its images and forms as possible led him to these statements: from all the history of art came a mandate for attentive vision.

Ad Reinhardt's association with the Whitney Museum began with his inclusion in the Museum's 1947 "Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture, Watercolors and Drawings." Thereafter his work was shown regularly in the Museum's annual contemporary surveys, with the exception of the years 1961 to 1965; during that period, Reinhardt did not participate in group exhibitions. His relationship with the Whitney Museum, like his dealings with most institutions, was not unclouded. *Museum Landscape*, a satire of the Whitney Museum 1950 Annual, is polite but potent; it established the tone for many future differences between the artist and the Museum. Reinhardt took umbrage at the representational bias within the democratic pluralism that characterized the Museum's point of view; as he inscribed at the bottom of this elaborate 1950 collage: "Have you ever seen a cross-section [group exhibition] that made any sense? Everything is treated as if it were the same thing."

In 1953, the Museum purchased its first

work by Reinhardt, *Number 18* of 1948–49. It was among the first of his works acquired by a major museum and, not counting Gallatin's purchase, the first by a major New York institution. It was followed two years later by the purchase of the 1953 *Number 17*. This painting was selected from "The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors," the Whitney Museum's earliest significant recognition of the New York School. Paintings by Baziotes, Brooks, de Kooning, Gottlieb, Kline, Motherwell, Pollock, Pousette-Dart, Reinhardt, Stamos and Tomlin were shown. *Number 17* and de Kooning's *Woman and Bicycle* were the only works bought from this exhibition, which included several previously acquired New York School paintings. This 1955 purchase also represented the first sale to a museum of one of Reinhardt's quasi-monochromatic paintings.

In 1957 Reinhardt whimsically formed SPOAF—Society for the Protection of Our Artist Friends (from themselves)—after reading the artists' statements in the catalogue of the Museum's "Nature in Abstraction" exhibition. The show and certain of its artists' statements were, in Reinhardt's opinion, a doleful attempt to falsely insert content into abstraction. Reinhardt, included in the Museum's 1962 survey of "Geometric Abstraction in America," publicly protested its version of the history of this sensibility within American art. His feeling softened sufficiently in December of 1966 to donate *Museum Landscape* to the Whitney, "for no special reason except the season to be jolly," as he wrote in his beautiful, thick, black-ink script in an accompanying letter.³ Also in 1966, Reinhardt's only multiple, a silkscreen on Plexiglas, was donated to the Museum by Mrs. Aaron H. Esman. In 1974, Susan Morse Hilles, a longtime trustee of the Museum, gave *Abstract Painting, Blue*. In 1976, 1977 and 1979, Rita Reinhardt, the artist's widow, made a series of gifts of Reinhardt's art to the Museum. These gifts—six cartoon-collages, six gouaches, an abstract cut-paper collage, and *Number 30*—have established the Museum as a major repository

of Reinhardt's art. An additional cartoon-collage was acquired in 1976 through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Friedman, Mr. and Mrs. Morton L. Janklow, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Schulhof and the John I. H. Baur Purchase Fund. In 1979, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman donated funds to acquire an important c. 1950 gouache study. The major deficiency in the Museum's representation of Reinhardt's art was filled in 1980 with the 50th Anniversary Gift by Fred Mueller of *Abstract Painting, Number 33*, from the culminating series of black paintings.

The Whitney Museum's collection of the art

of Reinhardt is unique in its capacity to reveal through many works on paper the artist's wit and working process, as well as including major paintings from all periods of his art. This "Concentration" is Reinhardt's first solo show here. His exhibition "Twenty-five Years of Abstract Painting" at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1960 was organized, in part, because he was not offered a retrospective at the Whitney Museum; there is some justice that now a small retrospective view of his art can be organized from the Museum's own holdings.

To be part of things or not to be part or having been part of things as they've become, to part from that part that was part of things as they are or not to part?

Part of life is more than life. Part of an artist is more than an artist. Everyman in the everyday today part of things lives like everyman. So do I. Part of myself is separate from my separate selves. Painting is special, separate.

Some claim to represent nature, hell on earth, sick society, inner turmoil, wild beasts, and things as they are. May not one side of me speak up for the side of the angels? (Wholeness by separation).

Separation, in the past, of painting from walls and books, from architecture and sculpture, from poetry and theatre, from religion, history, and nature, from decoration, documentation, and description, was achievement in awareness.

Separation, in history, of fine and liberal arts from labor and business, from trade skills and entertainment, from professions of pleasing and selling, was achievement in freedom.

Dumping together, in three American fauve decades (social-real, surreal, abstract-expressionism) of painting with primitivity, suffering, propaganda, subconsciousness, pleasure, sadism, publicity, symbolism, poverty, spleen, practicality, solvency, life, love, hate, fate, folk, instruction, irrationality, action personality and conspicuous patronization, was achievement in romancing.

Painting is special, separate, a matter of meditation and contemplation, for me, no physical action or social sport. "As much consciousness as possible." Clarity, completeness, quintessence, quiet. No noise, no schmutz, no schmerz, no fauve schwärmerei. Perfection, passiveness, consonance, consummateness. No palpitations, no gesticulation, no grotesquerie. Spirituality, serenity, absoluteness, coherence. No automatism, no accident, no anxiety, no catharsis, no chance. Detachment, disinterestedness, thoughtfulness, transcendence. No humbugging, no button-holing, no exploitation, no mixing things up. No lack of loftiness, no humourlessness.

Ad Reinhardt
New York, 1957

Reinhardt's statement for the catalogue of the exhibition "The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1955

Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967)

1913

Born Adolph Frederick Reinhardt, December 24, Buffalo, New York, the eldest of two sons. Father, Russian immigrant; mother, German immigrant. In America, parents associate themselves with the Lithuanian community. When he is two years old, family moves to New York City.

1931–35

Attends Columbia University.

1936–39

Studies at the National Academy of Design with Karl Anderson and John Martin and at the American Artists' School with Francis Criss and Carl Holty (1936). Joins Artists' Union (1936), American Abstract Artists (1937) and the American Artists' Congress (1939).

1936–41

Associated with Federal Art Project; works in Works Progress Administration (WPA), Easel Division.

1938

First group exhibition, American Abstract Artists annual exhibition.

1942–47

Works as artist-reporter for *PM* newspaper.

1943

First one-man show, Teachers College Gallery, Columbia University. Next one-man show the following year at the Artists' Gallery, New York.

1943–52

Takes numerous classes in art history at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (paid for by the G.I. Education Bill, 1945–46). Later makes special note of study with Alfred Salmony, an Orientalist, and Guido Schoenberger, an expert on Mathias Grünewald.

1944–45

Serves in United States Navy as a photographer.

1946

First exhibition with the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York (subsequent exhibitions there in 1947, 1948, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1965).

1947

Becomes associate professor, Brooklyn College (appointed full professor in 1963).

1948

Helps found the Artists' Club, a discussion group of New York School artists.

1949

Travels to Virgin Islands.

1950–53

Visiting professor and lecturer during summer session at the California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco (1950), and University of Wyoming (1951), where he is given one-man show. Painter-in-residence at Yale University (1952–53).

1952

First trip to Europe.

1953

On sabbatical, travels in Europe. Marries Rita Ziprowski, a painter.

1954

Only child born, daughter, Anna.

1958

Travels to Europe, Japan, India, Iran and Egypt.

1961

Travels to Turkey, Syria and Jordan. Begins teaching and lecturing at Hunter College, New York; continues until 1967.



Ad Reinhardt, c. 1965

1962

Travels to Mexico.

1964

Three concurrent one-man gallery exhibitions in New York; Betty Parsons Gallery (black paintings), Graham Gallery (red paintings), Stable Gallery (black paintings).

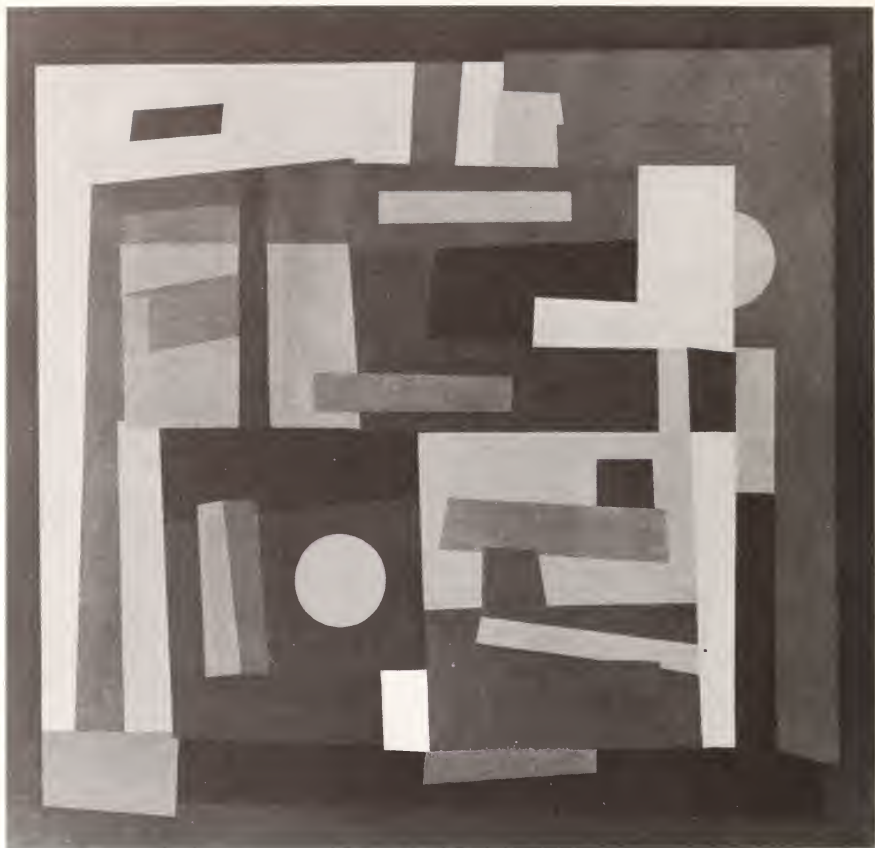
1966

Second visit to the Virgin Islands.

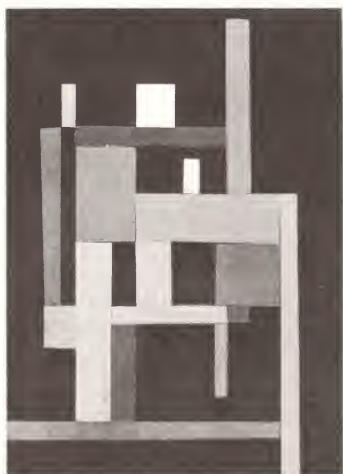
Retrospective of paintings, The Jewish Museum, New York.

1967

Receives Guggenheim fellowship; travels to Italy. Dies of a heart attack, August 30, in New York.



Number 30, 1938
 Oil on canvas, 40½ × 42½ inches
 Promised gift of Rita Reinhardt
 (on cover in color)



Collage, 1938
 Paper collage on paper, 15 × 11 inches
 Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.51

Number 30

Reinhardt filled his commentary on his early years with notations of his artistic achievements: making copies of the “funnies” at two, winning a watercolor flower painting contest at six, and receiving an award for pencil portraits of famous personalities of the day at thirteen. Yet his career as an artist did not begin until 1937.⁴ It followed four years of studying art history and aesthetics at Columbia University and a year of more practical instruction at Teachers College, the National Academy of Design and with the painters Francis Criss and Carl Holty. His earliest known works display an unusual authority. He had delayed making art he would choose to keep until he knew exactly what he wanted to paint, and thus deferred the tortuous trials most young artists undergo in their search for subjects and styles.

In 1938, at twenty-four, after experimenting with carefully composed and cut colored-paper studies like *Collage*, Reinhardt made in *Number 30* the most assured and zestful of his first series of paintings. Its startlingly varied and bright blocks and circles of color on neutral gray move beyond the simplified figurative references and Miró-esque shapes found in the work of Carl Holty, his most important teacher. They liberate themselves from the skeletal space coordinates of reality

avored by the influential Stuart Davis. The forms impinge on each other and lock together at acute angles. Within the now-familiar vocabulary of late 1930s American geometric non-objectivity, Reinhardt forged a distinctively vivid, spatially flat and asymmetrically balanced style.

Just as Reinhardt’s work of the mid- to late 1940s was often indistinguishable from that of the Abstract Expressionists, so his compositions of the late 1930s were profoundly interconnected with the work of other members of the American Abstract Artists. Paintings by Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Werner Drewes, A. E. Gallatin, Gertrude Greene, Fritz Glarner and Esphyr Slobodkina, all shown in early AAA annual exhibitions, closely parallel Reinhardt’s art of this period. As George L. K. Morris explained their work, “anyone who knows America can see the tone and color-contrasts are quite native, that the cumulative rhythmic organization resounds from an accent which could only have originated in America alone.”⁵ Lacking the advocacy of museums, in the absence of any private patronage and without dealers to assist them, the small band of American abstract artists turned to each other for encouragement and formed their own audience.



Untitled (N.Y. World's Fair), 1939
 Gouache on mat board, $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ inches
 50th Anniversary Gift of
 Rita Reinhardt 79.55



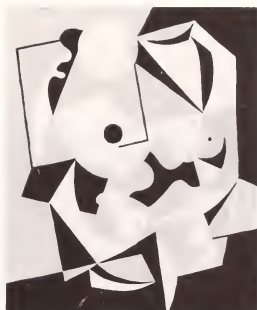
Untitled (N.Y. World's Fair), c. 1939
 Gouache on mat board, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ inches
 50th Anniversary Gift of
 Rita Reinhardt 79.56

Untitled, 1938 & Untitled (N.Y. World's Fair), 1939

Ilya Bolotowsky has spoken of the basic alternatives for American non-representational artists in the late 1930s as a choice between Miró and Mondrian.⁶ Bolotowsky resolutely opted for the straight-edged austerity of the Dutchman over the organic shapes of the Spaniard. Reinhardt left himself open to the possibilities of both. In the same year that Reinhardt precisely composed the rectilinear and flat *Collage*, he made the organic and spatial *Untitled*. Primarily attracted to rectilinear and geometric composition, in the 1938 *Untitled* he used curving shapes, overlaid forms and linear elements suggesting spatial depth, which anticipated his explorations of the 1940s.

Another example of Reinhardt's range and intellectualism occurs in a pair of gouache studies based upon the 1939 New York World's Fair. Didacticism is their major component. Executed in the style of Stuart Davis, they were a means to privately poke fun at the issue of abstraction versus representation. Like Robert Rauschenberg's erased de Kooning drawing and Frank Stella's 1962–63 painting *Jasper's Dilemma*, Reinhardt's gouaches offer a sincere homage in the form of a brilliant insult. For a man as committed to pure abstraction as Reinhardt, the more representational gouache is uncharacteristic to the point of parody. Davis, a studio neighbor in the late 1930s, was Reinhardt's most durable role model, not only for the independence of his art, but for the sardonic style and aggressive intelligence of his writings. In the mode of the master American abstractionist of the late 1930s, details of the Glass Incorporated building, the Star Pylon, and the Life Savers Parachute Tower are mixed with other of the Fair's moderne ingredients. Line, color and mass are explored within a complex but recognizable architectural vocabulary. Then, in the second gouache—with the subtraction of the lines, the filling in of color areas and the simplification of forms—the variety of non-

objective composition that Reinhardt preferred appears. It is reminiscent of Davis' earlier Eggbeater series, yet evinces an abstraction Davis would not utilize again for another decade. Writing about Davis in 1945, Reinhardt praised the artist, while lamenting Davis' need for recognizable images to give his paintings "'extra' meaning and 'ease' their communication."⁷ Capable of both geometric and organic styles, Reinhardt always insisted on non-objectivity.



Untitled, 1938
Gouache on mat board, 10 × 8 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 79.54



Stuart Davis
New York Waterfront, 1938
Oil on canvas, 22 × 30¼ inches
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo,
New York; Room of Contemporary Art Fund

Works of the 1940s

"1943—Wonders what Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko are up to when they announce: 'There is no such thing as good painting about nothing.'

1943—Continues making paintings about nothing"

—Ad Reinhardt, "Chronology."⁸

For much of the 1940s, Reinhardt reacted strongly against the logic and geometry of his work of the late 1930s. It was as if the surety of

his early work necessitated a period of more complex self-discovery. He later recalled the 1940s as his "decadent decade."⁹ His collages became increasingly intricate and entangled. Ragged edges and twisting lines of color began to appear. Complexity and diffusion of shapes into lines introduced a more arbitrary and personal note. Though his works from 1941 to 1949 exhibit a superficial kinship with the graphic pictorial structure used by Krasner, Pollock, David Smith, Rothko, Mark Tobey



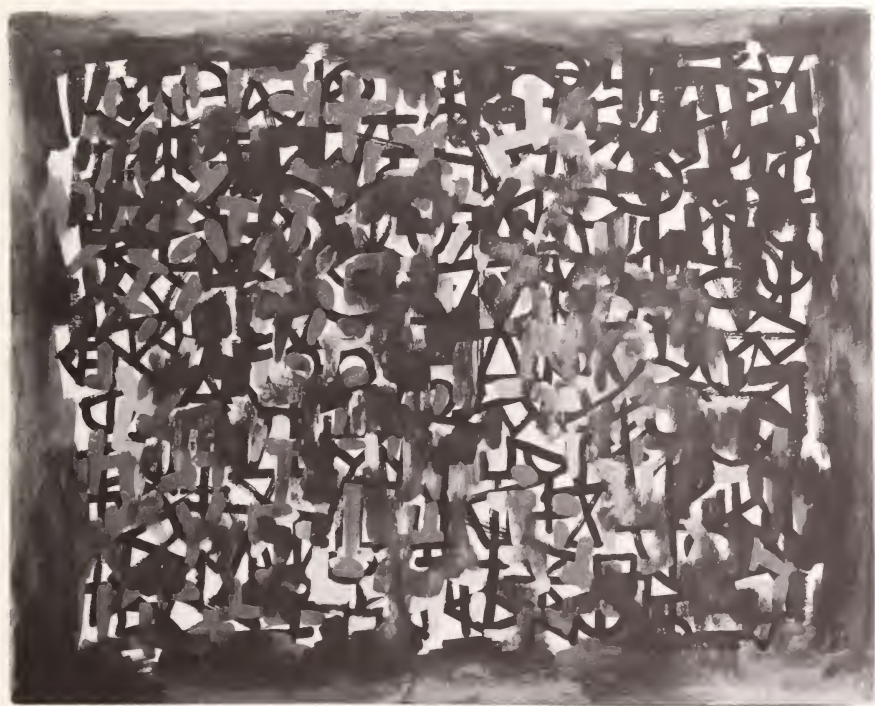
Untitled, 1946
Gouache on paper, $13\frac{3}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{8}$ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 79.57

and Tomlin, Reinhardt always disclaimed their belief in emotional and spiritual content. As his means became gestural and idiosyncratic, his stated intentions continued to be purely formal. He arrived at abstraction without necessarily passing through the way stations of Surrealism and personal expressionism. Reinhardt was essentially opposed to narrowing the gap between his life and his art.

His drawings and paintings of the 1940s expressed a personal style of mark-making that derived more from his study of Oriental art than from a desire to pictorialize emotions or psychological states. Starting in 1943, he

studied with the Orientalist Alfred Salmony at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. In 1947 he inaugurated a series of Asiatic art-history courses at Brooklyn College. Eastern principles of timelessness, the significance of continuity, repetition and tradition, and the recurrence of mathematical configuration were introduced into his aesthetic system, finding their fullest manifestation in the next decade.

Reinhardt's progression in this decade may be charted through the Museum's works. In *Untitled*, 1946, incendiary particles of color—purple, red and blue—are framed in brilliant



Untitled, c. 1947
Gouache on mat board, $16 \times 20\frac{1}{8}$ inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.58

green. Reinhardt used a device, made famous later by Hans Hofmann, of playing off organic shapes against rectangles of color. As Thomas B. Hess wrote later, Reinhardt here “simply lets loose his skyrockets while ardently denying the existence of a ‘bang.’”¹⁰ As his art evolved its calligraphic form, his use of color became more muted. The web of lines and shape areas was more rigorously integrated with a solidly toned background color. This diminishing of brightness and softening of structure is apparent in the later drawings in gouache. In a gouache study of around 1947, a

weave of black paintstrokes forms a dense barrier between cross-shaped surface marks and the white void beyond. Delicately hatched inked grids in a 1949 gouache are a foil for its more watery labyrinth—crude antecedents for the brick-like motifs of his next series of works. The forms of both gouaches are cushioned with soft borders.

Clues to Reinhardt’s own objectives in these works were provided in the little brochure that accompanied his 1948 Betty Parsons Gallery exhibition. He wrote twenty short descriptive titles and a general statement. These titles read



Untitled, 1949
Gouache and India ink on paper,
22 1/4 × 30 3/4 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.59

like sly suggestions for a pompous review of the exhibition, yet offer insight amidst their mockery. Among these brief descriptions one finds: “bits of information,” “non-iconic signs,” “space-markings,” “dialectic spectacle,” “sensuous surface remark” and “color-comment.” Formal content is definitely stressed; emotional implications are ignored.

Number 18, 1948–49, is a summation of the dichotomy of line and space which activates so much of his art in the 1940s. In this painting, vertical lines are contrasted with a horizontal format, vague totem-like shapes comport

themselves against their brushy background. As Hess observed, “it represents the Reinhardt waterfall at its best. Without beginning or end, like a Chinese scroll, it offers a minutely decorated surface covered without a particular plan or desire to epitomize any particular feeling, but simply to paint.”¹¹ In *Number 18*, 1948–49, forms shoot off the edge of the picture plane. The containment of much of his former art—both its geometric and organic versions—has been pierced, and the all-over surface of his later paintings makes an appearance in a lushly tangled form.



Number 18, 1948–49
Oil on canvas, 40 × 60 inches
Purchase 53.13

Untitled, c. 1950

The new decade is denoted in Reinhardt's art by the introduction of simplified, rectilinear, wide-brushed strokes of one color on top of another. In his parody analysis of his development, Reinhardt called this third phase of his art "archaic color-brick-brushstroke impressionism."¹² The strokes of paint that he had

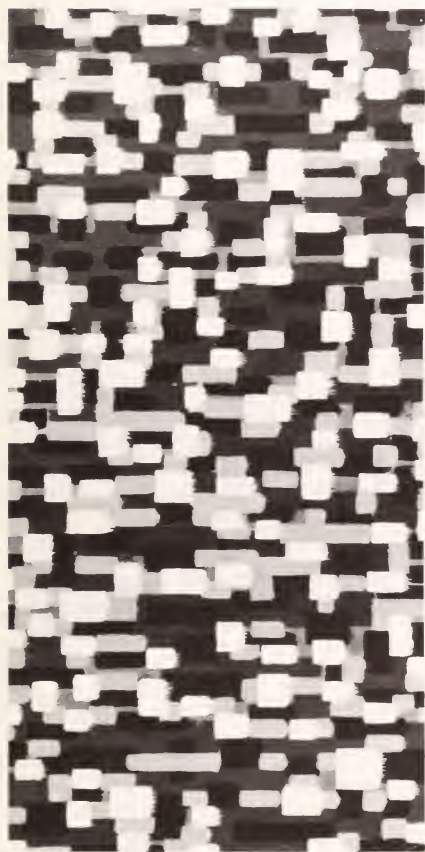
previously employed in calligraphic configurations were broken into sections and magnified. The strokes became not marks *on* but the structure *of* the picture. The personal note hinted at in so much of his art of the 1940s diminished. His pictures had less incident. At first, strong contrasts of the brick-motif color



Untitled, c. 1950
Gouache on paper, 22½ × 31 inches
(orientation undesignated)
50th Anniversary Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman 79.53

and the ground tonality were apparent. In time, their values became closer: the brick strokes became an all-over motif. The casualness seen in the Museum's c. 1950 gouache was replaced by a systematic interweaving of brick shapes. Edges were straightened and tightened. The horizontal placement of paintstrokes often contrasted with the verticality of the canvas shape. *Number 1*, 1952, illustrates these extensions of the ideas implicit in the

Museum's earlier study. This Reinhardt painting bears an uncanny resemblance to Bradley Walker Tomlin's *Number 1*, 1952. Both artists composed their paintings of paint marks; they pursued the activity of making increasingly simple marks with no emotional or intellectual connotations. These brick-like marks were ordered until they grew into solid blocks of variation upon one color.



Number 1, 1952
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown
Whereabouts unknown



Bradley Walker Tomlin
Number 1, 1952
Oil on canvas, 79 × 46 inches
Gift of Susan Morse Hilles 73.12

HOW TO LOOK AT A SPIRAL

An investigation into fundamentals by Ad Reinhardt

Any attempt to make modern painting more intelligible and communicative must involve a serious consideration of the spiral. The spiral is a democratic thing—anyone can make one—but what exactly does it represent? What has it meant in the past? How can artists use it for the future?

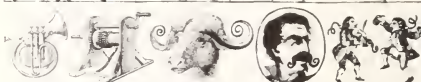
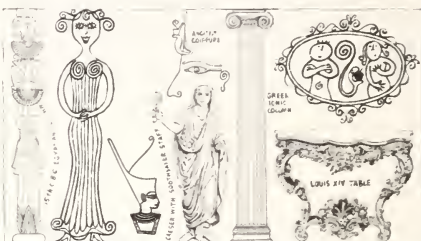
The ancient spiral was a picture of the immortal soul, a palace of the intestines, a dwelling place of a demon. It was a Greek scroll-decoration and a Chinese tiger-dragon, a sign of clouds and thunder and a charm against dark forces of evil. The earth shot off from the sun in a "logarithmic spiral" and a seventeenth century physicist insisted a spiral be engraved on his tomb as the symbol of "perpetual renaissance."



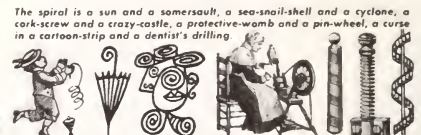
The spiral is "a rolling of a curve on itself infinitely" and a "coning of the cube." Its inward drive sucks and retreats and closes (escapism) and its outward unfolding spews and opens and discovers (hope). A microcosmic sign, a symbol for History and Evolution, a psycho-physical structure.



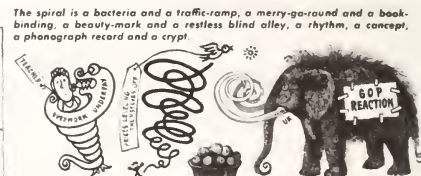
ITS USE IN HAND-DRAWN PICTURES...



The spiral today is a nebula and a navel, a snake, a scribble, and a stair-case, a whirling-planet and a bed-spring, an economic cycle and an elephant, an endless ecstasy and a rope-loop.



The spiral is a sun and a somersault, a sea-snail-shell and a cyclone, a cork-screw and a crazy-castle, a protective-womb and a pin-wheel, a curse in a cartoon-strip and a dentist's drilling.



ITS USE IN POLITICAL CARTOONS...



...Our Artist-reporter winds up (or unwinds)?

How to Look at a Spiral, 1946
Collage of ink and paper, 13 × 10 1/4 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.49

Cartoon-Collages

Reinhardt's cartoon-collages were up-to-the-minute bulletins on art, culture and perception. Gadfly of the art world, tireless pursuer and categorizer of information, frequenter and righteously combative participant at all symposia, Reinhardt found in the cartoon-collage a perfect medium. Actual drawing was subordinated to cut-and-pasted illustrations animated by brief commentaries. All varieties of printed sources, particularly nineteenth-century books with engravings, were cannibalized.

From the late 1930s through the early 1940s, Reinhardt had supported himself by assisting industrial designers (among others, Russel Wright) and as an illustrator (his controversial drawing of a figure with a visible navel, made for Ruth Benedict's *Races of Mankind*, helped resolve this now-dated issue). This training and experience were put to service in his first cartoon-illustration, produced for *PM*, a short-lived, leftist-oriented, New York afternoon newspaper. For a little under a year, beginning in late January 1946, one of Reinhardt's cartoons appeared every few weeks in *PM*'s Sunday magazine section. They were information-filled parodies on the "How to" series: "How to Look at an Artist," "How to Look at Space," "How to Look at Things through a Wire-Glass," "How to Look at More than Meets the Eye," and eighteen other multi-image and text sheets. The general purpose of the series was to satirize "Bauhaus, surrealist and expressionist pretensions to meaning."¹³ The final cartoon in the *PM* group, "How to Look at a Spiral," never ran.¹⁴ The management seems to have realized that Reinhardt was mocking them too; he was fired. *How to Look at a Spiral* and *A Page of Jokes*, a grab bag of humor in the vein of the "How to" series, survive and are in the Museum's collection only because they never got to press; the other *PM* cartoons exist as photo reproductions from surviving copies of the newspaper.

While Reinhardt's often arcane art-world references were toned down as his *PM* series progressed, his three centerfold cartoons for the annual issues of the publication *trans/formation* are unadulterated art-world satires. Under the direction of Harry Holtzman, an associate of Reinhardt's in the American Abstract Artists group, each issue of this serious journal was lightened by a Reinhardt cartoon-collage. *Museum Landscape* appeared in 1950 and commented upon the "abstract" affiliations of the participants and non-participants in that year's Whitney Museum Annual Exhibition. A review of the show was headlined "Abstraction Crowned at Whitney Annual" and Reinhardt parodied the "abstraction" of Charles Burchfield, Philip Evergood, Ben Shahn, John Sloan and others. *Museum Racing Form* was published in the next year's issue. It successfully used horse racing as a paradigm of the art world. To *trans/formation* 3, Reinhardt contributed *Art of Life of Art*, a page of outrageous jokes and word plays. Amidst its cornucopia of puns, it featured such Joycean combinations of artists' names as "well I'll be a shahn of a bouche!" and "tanguy varga much!"

The final forum for Reinhardt's pictorial reportage was *Art News* magazine, where the lively and impassioned editorship of Thomas B. Hess was just beginning. Hess had a great affinity for Reinhardt's intelligence and caustic humor, and between 1954 and 1966 seven articles by Reinhardt appeared in the magazine. Reinhardt's *Our Favorites*, his first *Art News* cartoon, appeared in March 1952. It was a response to a Wildenstein Gallery exhibition for the benefit of the Whitney Museum's purchase fund. The major critics for the seven leading art publications each chose ten favorite paintings. Reinhardt was not one of the artists selected and Ben Shahn's *Vacant Lot* was the most frequently requested work. As in Reinhardt's other *Art News* cartoons, art dealers, critics and museum personnel were

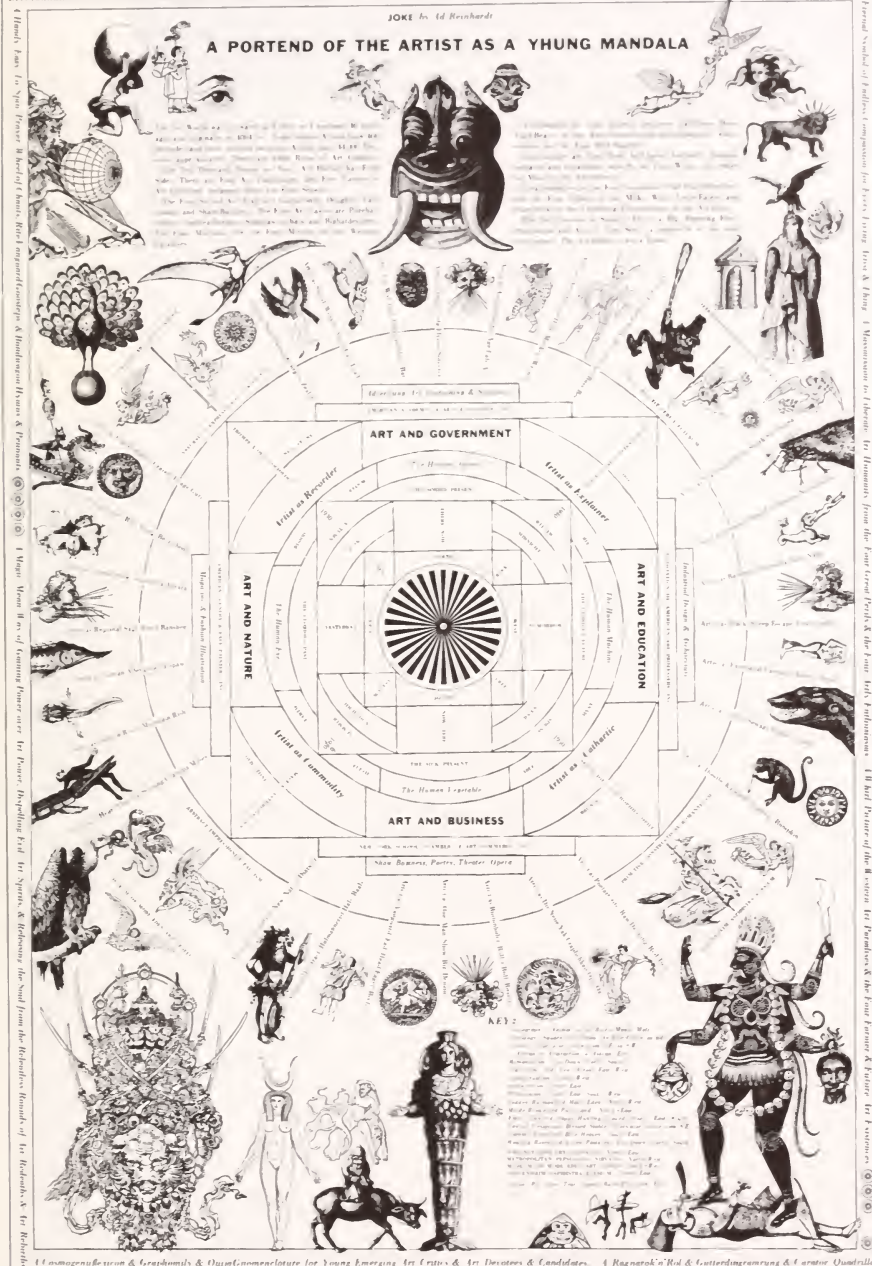
given nearly equal time with artists. The system was unmasked; everyone was acerbically categorized. *Founding fathers folly day* was published in *Art News* two years later, in April 1954. Again a barrage of puns crowded the page. Sections of it were devoted to imaginary athletic contests pitting, in boxing, Rothko against Still and Diller against Albers. In team-wrestling, the Kootz Gallery artists, "Kootzen-jammer Kids," were matched against the Sidney Janis stable, the "JanisJaguars."

A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala was printed in May 1956 in *Art News*. The mandala's four basic sections dealt with art in relation to government, nature, education and

business. Its key unlocked the mysteries of the art world, revealing, for instance, in a north-east quadrant of the mandala, that the Whitney Museum was a "Fish-Fry Valhalla." Its complexity—like the simplicity of the "black" painting he started this same year—is comprehensible only after intensive and concentrated viewing: attentive vision is rewarded with enlightenment. With the "black" paintings came a cessation of the cartoon-collage aspect of Reinhardt's art, though in 1961 a severely pruned version of his 1946 PM cartoon "How to Look at Modern Art in America" appeared in *Art News*.

JOKE by A. Reinhardt

A PORTEND OF THE ARTIST AS A YHUNG MANDALA



A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala,
1956
Collage of ink and paper, 20 1/4 x 13 1/2 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.45



Abstract Painting, Blue, 1953
Oil on canvas, 50 × 28 inches
Gift of Susan Morse Hilles 74.22

Abstract Painting, Blue & Number 17

"But it may be said that geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer"—Apollinaire.¹⁵

As early as 1948, Reinhardt implemented the idea of closely toned all-over geometric paintings, but he did not completely adopt this approach until after 1953. As his series of

color-brick paintings developed, spaces between the paintstrokes were carefully filled in and the edges of the color areas sharpened. The paint was applied as evenly as possible, and the color values narrowed. The interwoven brick shapes often formed a nearly solid tonality. In 1953 Reinhardt had been, as he wrote two years later, "interested in painting as a 'field' of



Number 17, 1953
Oil and tempera on canvas,
77³/₄ × 77³/₄ inches
Purchase 55.36

color, as a 'total image.'"¹⁶ That year he made "a series of canvases with closely related dark grays, a number of paintings in reds, and one or two in blue-greens."¹⁷ Logic began to rule Reinhardt's art once again; balanced, asymmetrical composition, still seen in *Number 17*, was joined by the rigid symmetry apparent in *Abstract Painting, Blue*.

While moving toward his ultimate series of black paintings, Reinhardt insisted of *Number 17* that it had "no concern especially with light, form or space divisions or relationships, nor with color contrasts."¹⁸ His perceptions of his own work aside, the thrust of the final period of Reinhardt's work was toward building upon, yet remaining distinct from, his dual sources, Mondrian and Albers. A recent publication on Reinhardt established at length the fascinating parallels between the development of Mondrian and of Reinhardt. Yet the author acknowledges from the outset the tenuousness of their proven direct connections.¹⁹ As Reinhardt asserted, "I was never really part of any post-Mondrian group, though I knew him. . . . My preoccupation with symmetry and colorlessness is the great change. . . . This change isn't mine entirely . . . Albers has been symmetrical for a long time."²⁰

Exactly at the time he was formulating a new direction in his work, Reinhardt was in direct contact with Albers. In the winter and spring of 1952 and 1953, Reinhardt taught at Yale University. The position had been offered to him by Albers, who had commenced in 1950 his eight-year direction of Yale's art department. Albers had begun his "Homage to the Square" series in the summer of 1949. He pursued his systematic format as vigorously as

Reinhardt pursued the Greek cross motif. The squares in Albers' paintings have a symmetry akin to Reinhardt's use of the five-square Greek cross, yet, as Bruce Glaser pointed out concerning a typical Albers painting, it is "not [symmetrical] if you turn it on its side."²¹

Turned on its side, *Abstract Painting, Blue* retains symmetry. Its central Greek cross is contained by three-square bars at top and bottom. Of this shape and the color black, one recalls that Reinhardt listed Georgia O'Keeffe's *Black Cross, New Mexico* in his chronology as one of the seminal works of the twentieth century. The individual squares of color can function alone or merge into bars. In muted, natural, changing light, Reinhardt's squares flow together, alternately horizontally and vertically. The quality of color in *Abstract Painting, Blue* suggests the tones of the Caribbean waters off the Virgin Islands, which Reinhardt, awaiting a divorce from his first wife, had visited in 1949. In undated notes, he describes blue as the "color of villains, ghosts and fiends . . . hope, heaven, sky."²²

Number 17 is one of Reinhardt's very last large-scale, asymmetrically composed paintings. Contrary to Reinhardt's declarations, meticulous concern was obviously taken in its spatial relationships and coloristic balance. But the arrangement of its small squares and larger squares and rectangles is not programmatic. In order to eliminate such subjective arrangements and to systematize his art, Reinhardt soon elected to limit his paintings to a single composition and color. In his black paintings, he pursued an art of subtle mutability based upon the negation of as many variables as possible.

Abstract Painting, Number 33

"A square (neutral, shapeless) canvas, five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man's outstretched arms (not large, not small, sizeless), trisected (no composition), one horizontal form negating one vertical form (formless, no top, no bottom, directionless), three (more or less) dark (lightless) no-contrasting (colorless) colors, brushwork brushed out to remove brushwork, a matte, flat, free-hand painted surface (glossless, textureless, non-linear, no hard edge, no soft edge) which does not reflect its surroundings—a pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting—an object that is self-conscious (no unconsciousness) ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art (absolutely no anti-art)"
—Ad Reinhardt.²³

Around 1954 asymmetry, irregular compositions and bright (i.e., red and blue) tonalities were purged from Reinhardt's art. These changes coincided with three events in his life: his teaching duties at Yale University in 1952–53; his marriage in 1953 to Rita Ziprowski, a young painter; and the birth of their only child, a daughter, the following year. This second marriage and a child set up a new rhythm in his life. By 1956 Reinhardt painted only the symmetric, so-called "black" paintings that concluded his art. Other American artists—most notably Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, Leon Polk Smith and Clyfford Still—had previously made essentially black paintings. But no one before had set out so earnestly to create, in the artist's own words, "the last painting which anyone can make."²⁴

The discussion that has surrounded these works has been controversial and is, characteristically, dominated by Reinhardt's writings. He had represented the series as "unmanipulated and unmanipulatable, useless, unmarketable, irreducible, unphotographable, un-reproducible, inexplicable icons. A non-entertainment, not for art commerce or mass-art

publics, non-expressionistic, not for oneself."²⁵ As he undoubtedly would have predicted, many of Reinhardt's characterizations have been invalidated: the black paintings have become immensely desired icons of post-war American art and the subject of numerous interpretations. They quickly achieved a wide, if at first confounded and unconvinced, audience. Reinhardt noted that in 1955 he was listed in *Fortune* magazine as "one of the top twelve investments in 'art'" and added that the next year he had to borrow money to pay for one of the first of the many trips he took during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁶

In pushing toward an extreme position and narrowing the terms of his art, Reinhardt seemed to have opened these paintings to wide explication and speculation. In 1963, Hilton Kramer perceived these final works as "the most genuinely nihilistic paintings I know . . . a cry of despair disguised as a Utopian manifesto."²⁷ Fairfield Porter wrote in 1964 that "Reinhardt carrying non-objectivity to the logical extreme of disembodied estheticism, plays in New York School painting the role that Seurat played in Impressionism. He tries to validate it by reducing it to an ideal."²⁸ In 1975, Barbara Rose suggested they were "icons without iconography."²⁹

The manifold political, spiritual, artistic and obsessive implications of Reinhardt's black paintings have been separately analyzed by Barbara Rose and, at length, by Lucy Lippard. Discussion might best be summarized in the terms chosen by an artist who admired Reinhardt's work deeply enough to acquire one of the series for himself: Frank Stella said of these works, "If you don't know what they're about you don't know what painting is about."³⁰ Since all explanations are at odds with the works' intentions, Reinhardt's notes suggest that these paintings might best be defined by what they are not: "anti-anti-art, non-non-art, non-expressionist, non-imagist, non-surrealist, non-primitivist, non-fauvist, non-futurist,

non-figurative, non-objective, non-subjective, non-action, non-romantic, non-visionary, non-imaginative, non-mythical, non-organic, non-vitalist, non-violent, non-vulgar, non-naturalist, non-supernaturalist, anti-accident, anti-brute-junk-pop-folk art, non-local, non-regionalist, non-nationalist, non-representational, non-poetic, non-dramatic, non-entertainment, non-naïve, non-barbaric, non-nomadic, non-rural, non-eccentric, non-racist, non-commercial, non-linear, non-diagrammatic, non-tachist, non-informal, non-irregular, non-sculptural, non-architec-

tural, non-mural, non-decorative, non-colorist, non-ready-made, non-spontaneous, non-irrational, non-sensational, non-impulsive, non-physical, non-technical, non-asymmetrical, non-gesticulating, non-gesturing, anti-happening, non-mannerist, non-plastic, non-relational, non-venal, non-calligraphic.”³¹ Calling into question much previous art and providing a sturdy platform for subsequent work, Reinhardt’s greatest achievement resides in the unrelenting, meditative and quiescent surfaces of these final paintings.



Abstract Painting, Number 33, 1963
Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of Fred Mueller 80.33

Notes

1. Ad Reinhardt, "Chronology," in *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1975), p. 4.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948), p. 154.
3. Ad Reinhardt, letter to Lloyd Goodrich, director of the Whitney Museum, December 22, 1966, in Artists' Files, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
4. Reinhardt twice gave this date as the year he began to paint seriously. See Ad Reinhardt, response to questionnaire, June 1955, in Artists' Files, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and George L. K. Morris, *American Abstract Artists*, exhibition catalogue (New York: American Abstract Artists, 1939), unpaginated.
5. Morris, *American Abstract Artists*, unpaginated.
6. Ilya Bolotowsky, interview by Louise Averill Svendsen, in *Ilya Bolotowsky* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1974), p. 20.
7. Ad Reinhardt, review of Stuart Davis exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *New Masses*, November 27, 1945; reprinted in *Stuart Davis*, ed. Diane Kelder (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 196.
8. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 6.
9. Ad Reinhardt, quoted in Thomas B. Hess, *The Art Comics and Satires of Ad Reinhardt* (Düsseldorf, West Germany: Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Rome: Marlborough Galleria d'Arte, 1975), p. 19.
10. Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase* (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1951), p. 145.
11. Ibid.
12. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 10.
13. Ibid., p. 15.
14. Around 1947, Reinhardt gave a lecture on "The Spiral Form in Modern Architecture" at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; see Margit Rowell, *Ad Reinhardt and Color*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1980), p. 21.
15. Quoted in Fairfield Porter, *Art in Its Own Terms: Selected Criticism, 1935-1975*, ed. Rackstraw Downes (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979), p. 66.
16. Reinhardt, response to questionnaire, June 1955.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Rowell, *Ad Reinhardt and Color*, pp. 11-22.
20. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 21.
21. Ibid.
22. Quoted in Rowell, *Ad Reinhardt and Color*, p. 24.
23. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, pp. 82-83.
24. Ibid., p. 13.
25. Ibid., p. 83.
26. Ibid., p. 7.
27. Hilton Kramer, "Art," *The Nation*, June 22, 1963, p. 534.
28. Porter, *Art in Its Own Terms*, p. 106.
29. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 82.
30. Frank Stella, in "A Tribute to Ad Reinhardt," *Arts Canada*, October 1967, Artscan section, p. 2.
31. Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 102.

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Works in the Permanent Collection

Collage, 1938

Paper collage on paper, 15 × 11 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.15

Number 30, 1938

Oil on canvas, 40½ × 42½ inches
Promised gift of Rita Reinhardt

Untitled, 1938

Gouache on mat board, 10 × 8 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 79.54

Untitled (N.Y. World's Fair), 1939

Gouache on mat board, 8½ × 11 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.55

Untitled (N.Y. World's Fair), c. 1939

Gouache on mat board, 8¾ × 11½ inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.56

How to Look at a Spiral, 1946

Collage of ink and paper, 13 × 10¼ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.49

A Page of Jokes, 1946

Collage of ink and paper, 9¾ × 16½ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.50

Untitled, 1946

Gouache on paper, 13¾ × 17¾ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 79.57

Untitled, c. 1947

Gouache on mat board, 16 × 20⅞ inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.58

Number 18, 1948–49

Oil on canvas, 40 × 60 inches
Purchase 53.13

Untitled, 1949

Gouache and India ink on paper,
22¼ × 30¾ inches
50th Anniversary Gift of
Rita Reinhardt 79.59

Museum Landscape, 1950

Collage of ink and paper, 9½ × 22⅞ inches
Gift of the artist 66.141

Untitled, c. 1950

Gouache on paper, 22½ × 31 inches
(orientation undesignated)
50th Anniversary Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman 79.53

Museum Racing Form, 1951

Collage of ink and paper, 8⅞ × 21½ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.47

Art of Life of Art, 1952

Collage of ink and paper, 10 × 24½ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.48

Our Favorites, 1952

Collage of ink and paper, 14¾ × 21 inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Friedman, Mr. and
Mrs. Morton L. Janklow, Mr. and Mrs.
Rudolph Schulhof and the John I. H. Baur
Purchase Fund 76.52

Abstract Painting, Blue, 1953

Oil on canvas, 50 × 28 inches
Gift of Susan Morse Hilles 74.22

Number 17, 1953

Oil and tempera on canvas,
77¾ × 77¾ inches
Purchase 55.36

Foundingfathersfollyday, 1954

Collage of ink and paper, 12 × 20 inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.46

A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala, 1956

Collage of ink and paper, 20¼ × 13½ inches
Gift of Rita Reinhardt 76.45

Abstract Painting, Number 33, 1963

Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of Fred Mueller 80.33

Abstract Print, 1965

Silkscreen on Plexiglas, 12 × 12 inches
Gift of Mrs. Aaron H. Esman 66.94h

CONCENTRATIONS

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